

WILLINGHAM • BUCKINGHAM • LEIALOHA • PEPOY



F A B L E S™

VERTIGO

Buckingham

134 Dec '13
suggested for
mature readers
vertigo.com

I'm in Heaven.

The forest is vast, endless,
and incandescent with life.

Pregnant with
every good sound
and smell.

DEEPER INTO THE WOODS

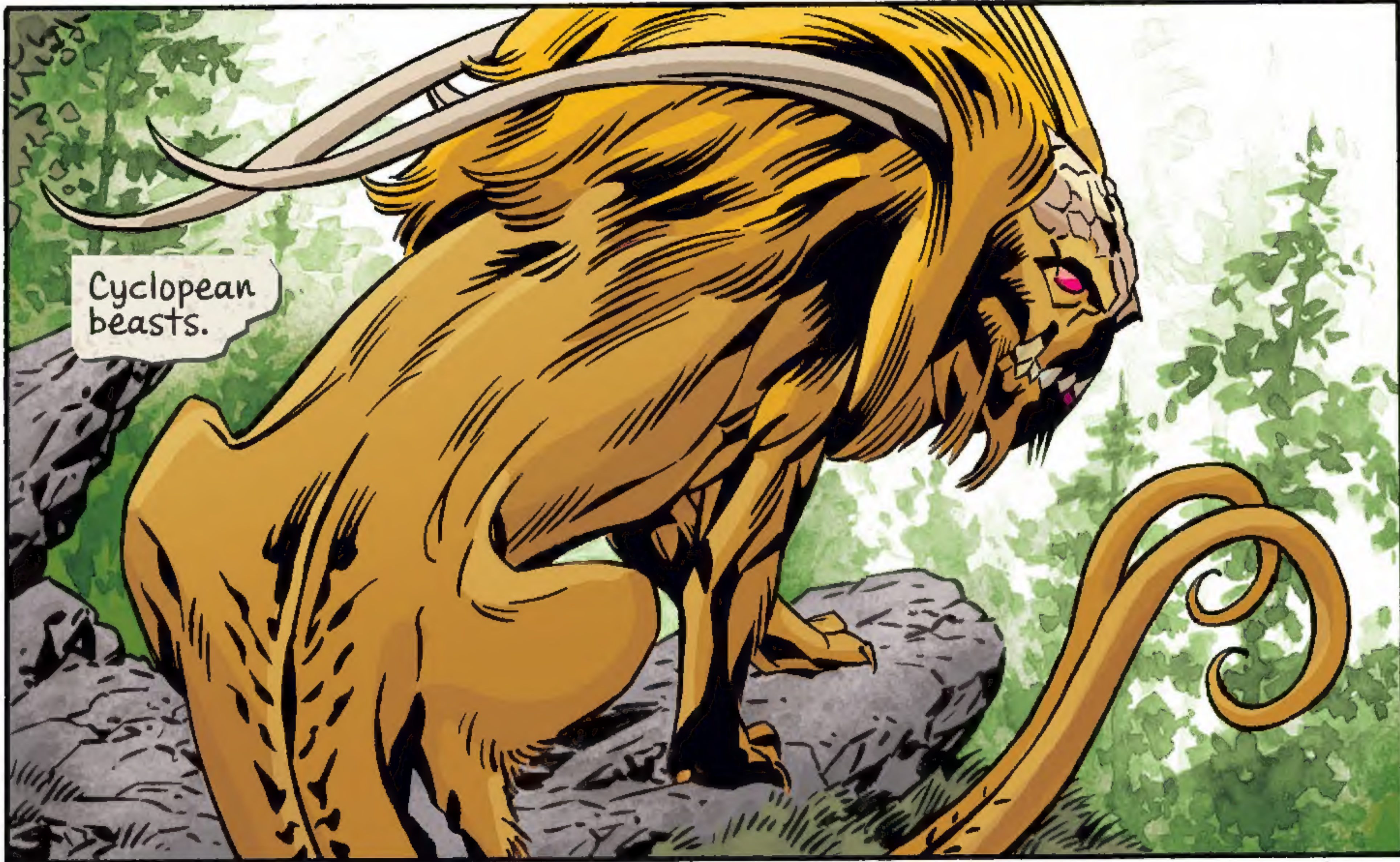
A
Camelot
INTERLUDE

Bill Willingham writer/creator	Mark Buckingham pencils	Steve Leialoha inks 1-13, 19-20	Andrew Pepoy inks 14-18
Lee Loughridge colors	Todd Klein letters	Mark Buckingham cover	Gregory Shelly Lockard Bond assoc. ed. editor



There are
monsters
here.


Maybe I should say
other monsters, now
that I'm here, too.



Cyclopean
beasts.




Serpents.




And giants in the earth.

Rivals against whom I will eventually test myself.

For what good is a hunting ground one hasn't fought and risked everything to win?




But first a more practical sort of test. I'll compete against tonight's dinner.



Brother Wind tells me a story of animals, strong and healthy, fat but crazy swift.

My belly's empty, and I'm ravenous.



Ready to fight for their lives at a moment's notice.



Their arsenal is sprint and evade, slip, duck, bolt, break, dodge and maneuver, and those weapons are not meager.

Mine are — well, you know mine by now, or you never will.



I live for this!

The eternal chess match played between two old enemies, Flight and Fury.



The frantic chase.

The final pounce.



The snap of my jaws.

And then the sweet
coppery explosion of
blood across my
muzzle.

GOT
YOU NOW.



HAAAAARRRR
RRRRROOOO

DAMNATION!



HUNTING
HORNS?

HAAAAARRRRR
RRRRROOOO

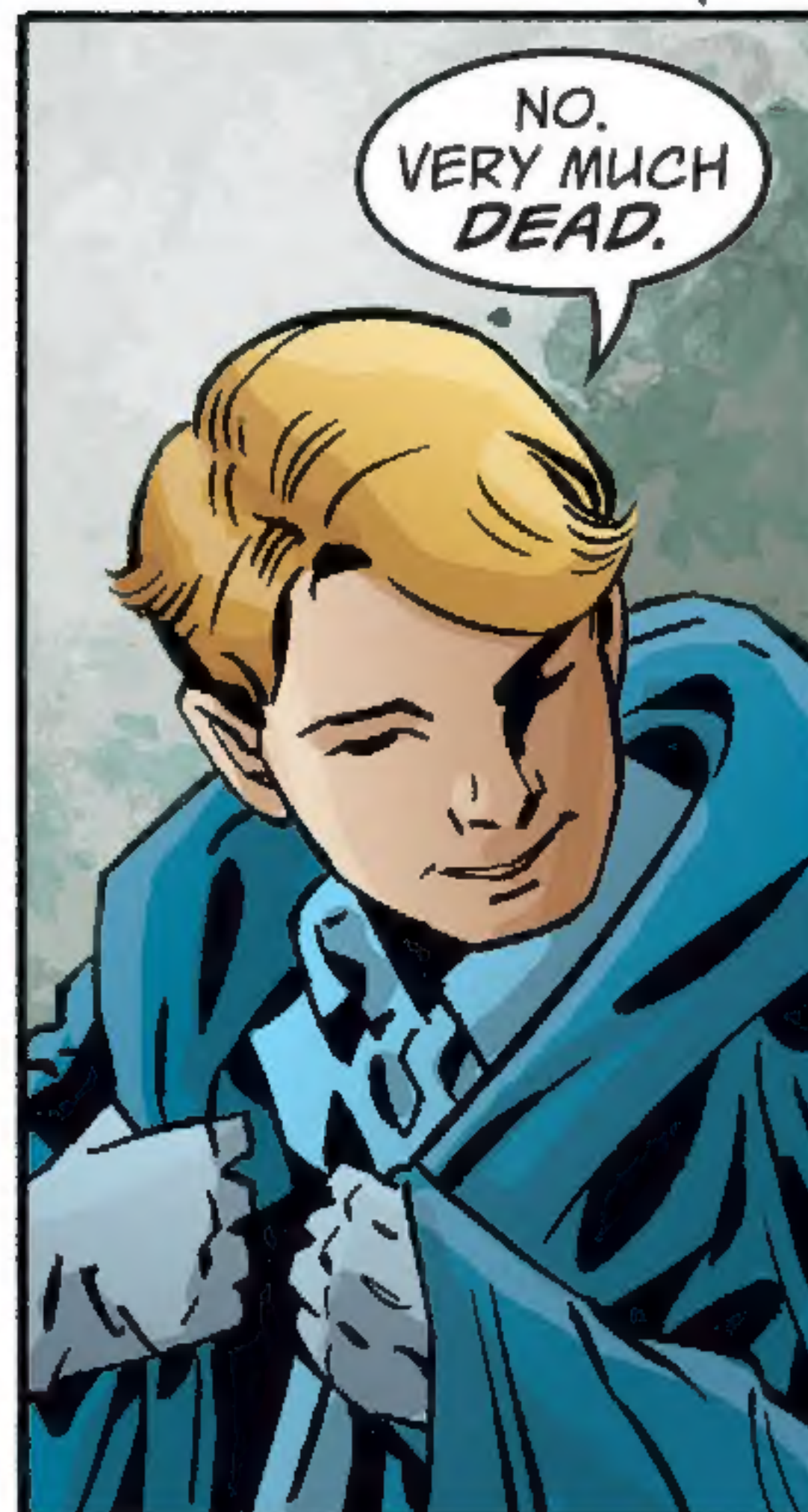
WHO
DARES IN MY
WOODS?



Come on, winds.
Best cooperate
now, or suffer
later.

Bring
me the
intruder's
scent.



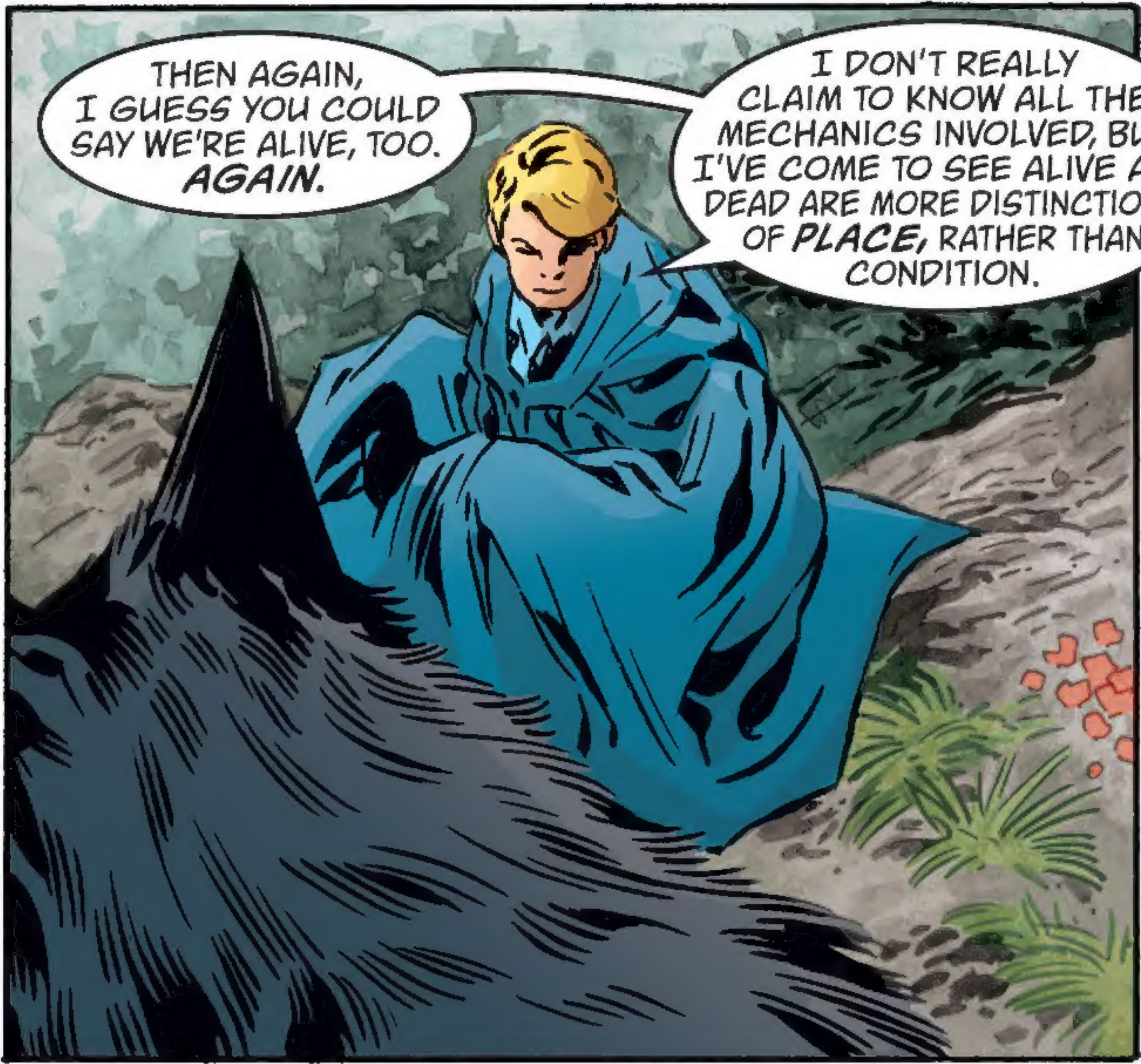




JUST LIKE YOU.

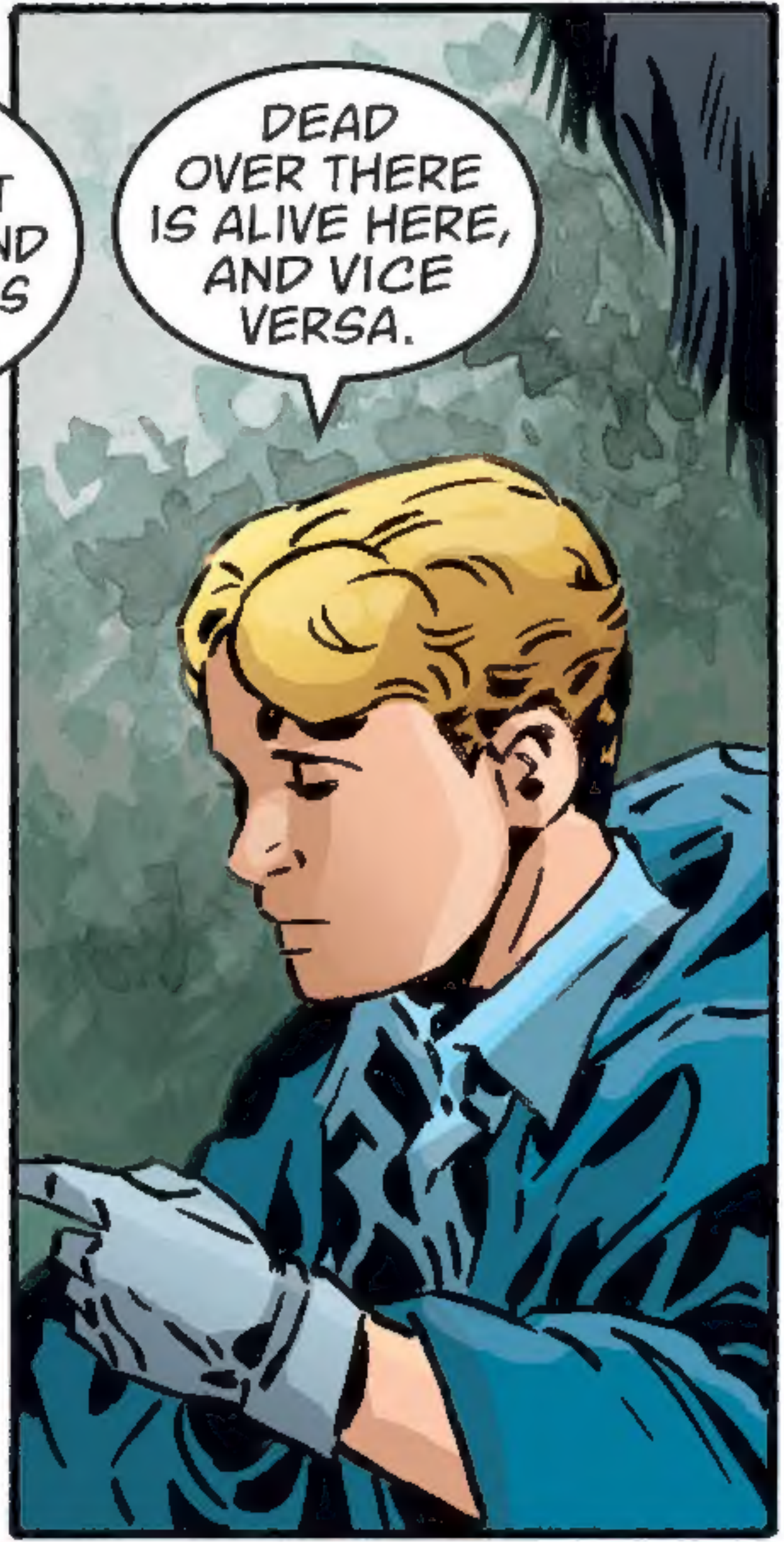


SORT OF THE POINT OF PLACES LIKE THIS.



THEN AGAIN, I GUESS YOU COULD SAY WE'RE ALIVE, TOO. AGAIN.

I DON'T REALLY CLAIM TO KNOW ALL THE MECHANICS INVOLVED, BUT I'VE COME TO SEE ALIVE AND DEAD ARE MORE DISTINCTIONS OF PLACE, RATHER THAN CONDITION.



DEAD OVER THERE IS ALIVE HERE, AND VICE VERSA.



HOW ARE YOU, BIGBY?

BEEN THROUGH SOME TOUGH DAYS, HUH?



I...I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

IT'S OKAY, BUDDY. I WAS THE SAME WAY AT FIRST.

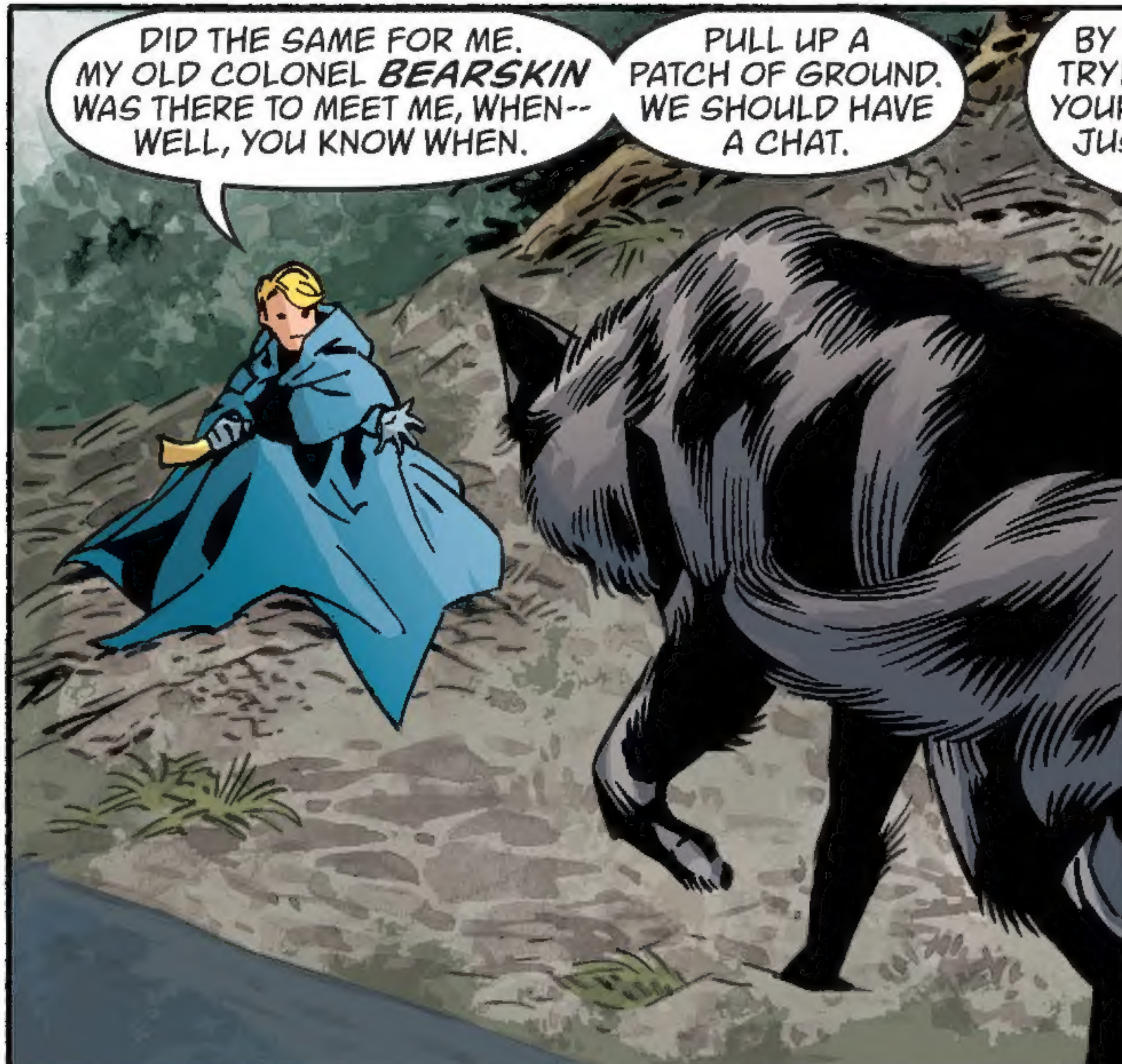
THAT'S ONE OF THE REASONS I ASKED TO MEET YOU--TO HELP DISPEL SOME OF THE EARLY CONFUSION AND DISORIENTATION.

SOME OF THE **LANDS AFTER LIFE** ARE RUN BY THE SAME SORTS OF JERKS AND ASSHATS ONE ENCOUNTERS ANYWHERE. DEPENDS ON THE PLACE ONE ENDS UP.

BUT THE FOLKS WHO HANDLE THE TRANSITIONS ARE PRETTY DECENT. THEY DON'T **JUDGE**, SINCE SO MUCH OF THAT IS COMING LATER ON.



SO, WHEN **SCHEDULES** CAN BE WORKED OUT, THEY'LL OFTEN LET AN OLD FRIEND COME TO WELCOME A NEW ARRIVAL.



DID THE SAME FOR ME. MY OLD COLONEL **BEARSKIN** WAS THERE TO MEET ME, WHEN--WELL, YOU KNOW WHEN.

PULL UP A PATCH OF GROUND. WE SHOULD HAVE A CHAT.

BY THE WAY, I WASN'T TRYING TO CHASE OFF YOUR **DINNER**. SORRY. JUST BAD TIMING ON MY PART.

NOT MY FIRST FAILURE OF TIMING, I SUPPOSE.

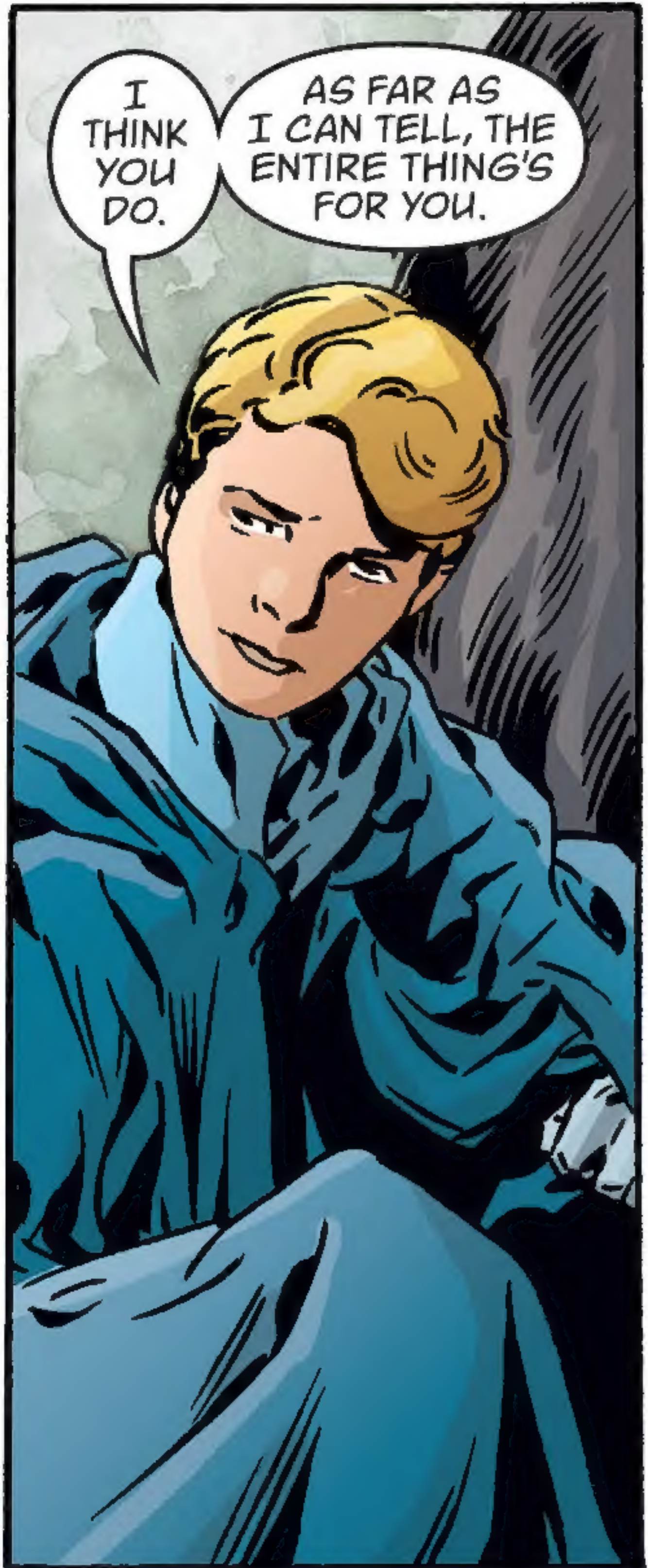




I WAS BLOWING MY HORN TO CALL YOU.

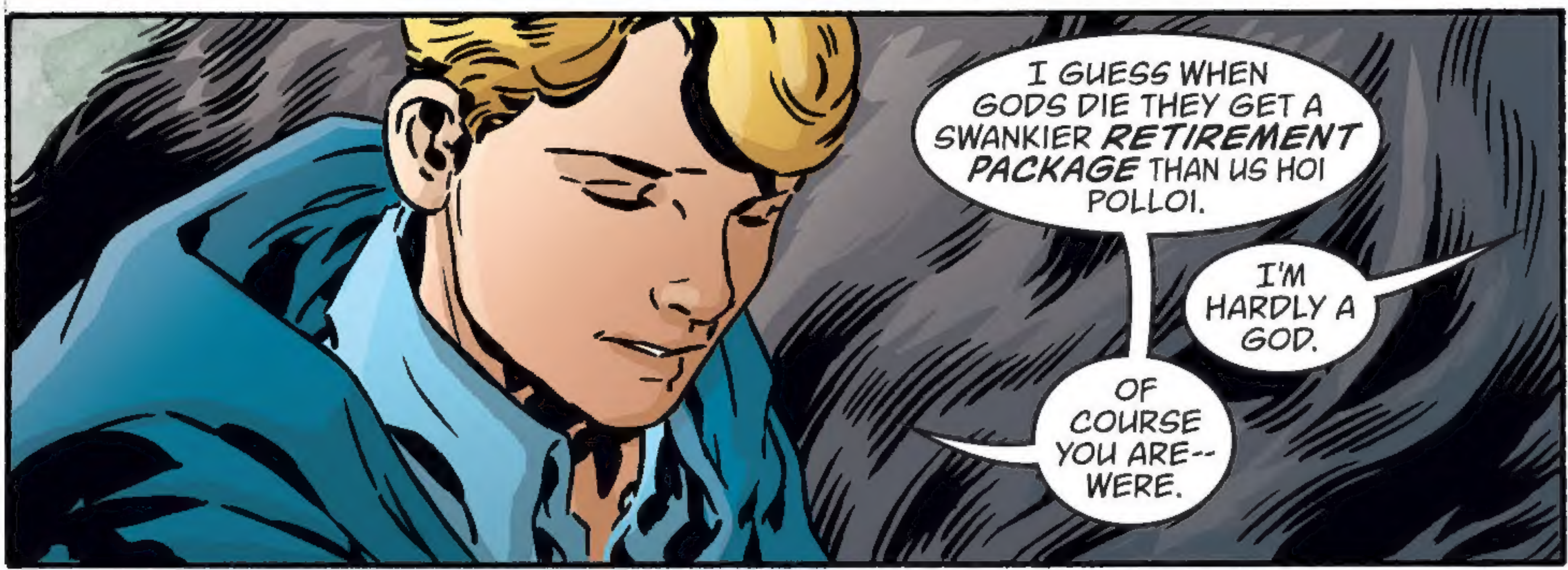
I DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I'VE BEEN HERE, BUT...

...I WAS BEGINNING TO BELIEVE I HAD THE FOREST TO MYSELF.



I THINK YOU DO.

AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, THE ENTIRE THING'S FOR YOU.



I GUESS WHEN GODS DIE THEY GET A SWANKIER *RETIREMENT PACKAGE* THAN US HOI POLLOI.

I'M HARDLY A GOD.

OF COURSE YOU ARE-- WERE.



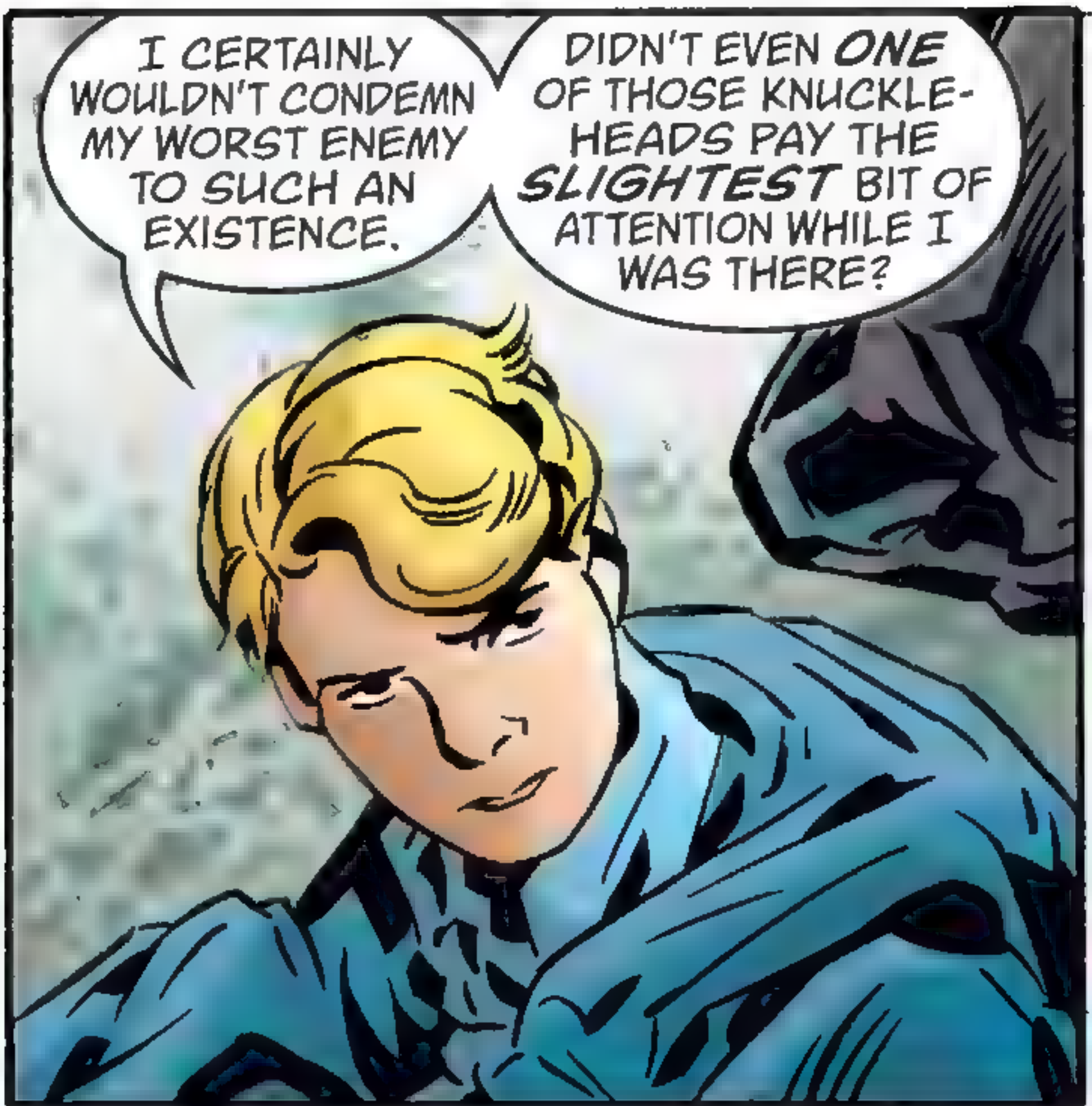
PROBABLY STILL ARE.

LESS NARCISSISTIC THAN MOST, BUT NO RULES AGAINST A GOD BEING HUMBLE.



SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHAT THE HELL WAS STINKY *THINKING*, STARTING THAT CULT ABOUT ME?

PLEASE TELL THEM, PUT *AWAY* THE BLUE SCARVES AND THE COMICALLY REVERENT TALK OF HOW I'LL COME *BACK* SOMEDAY TO KILL THEIR ENEMIES AND *SOLVE* ALL THEIR PROBLEMS.

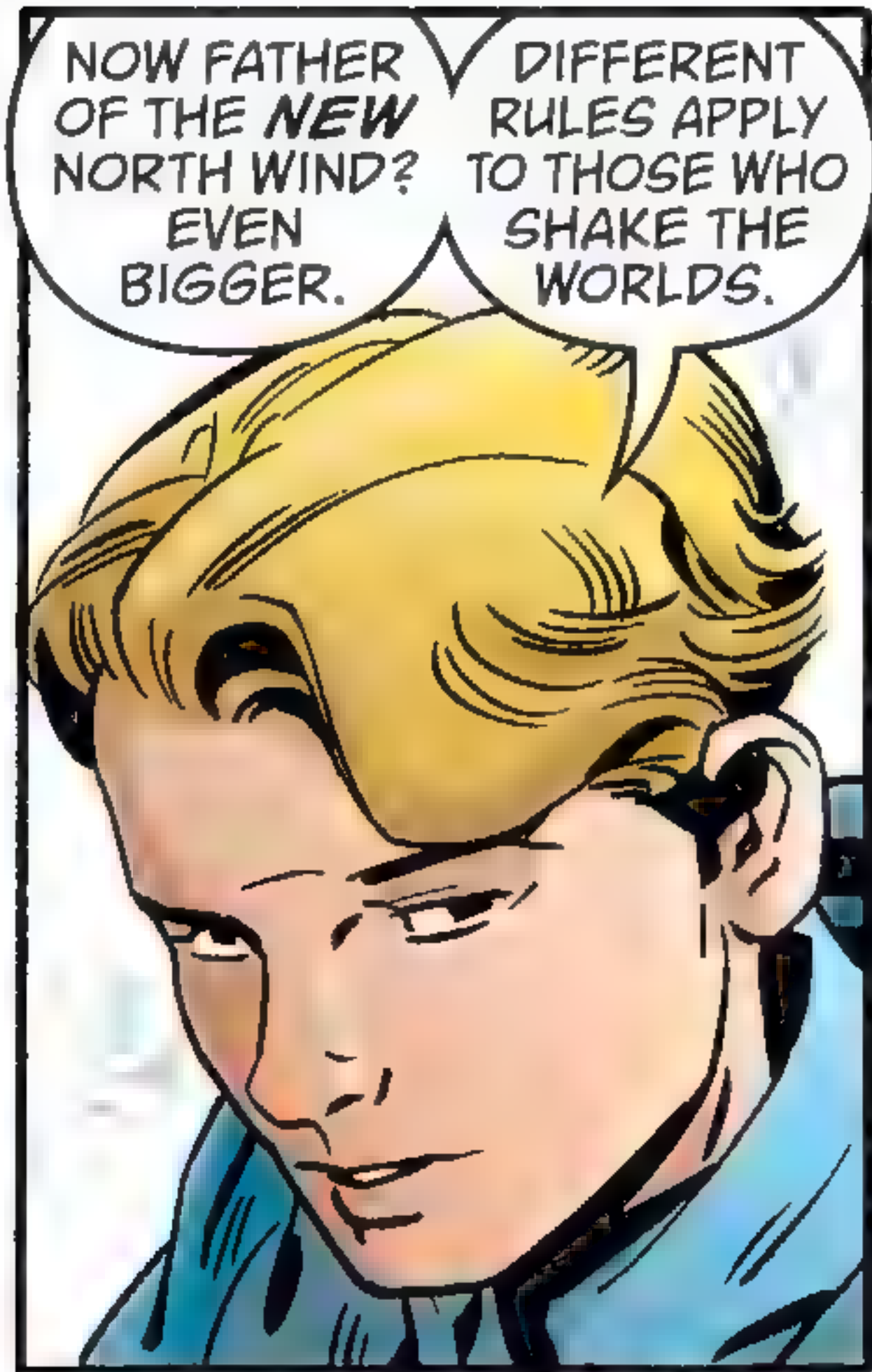




OF COURSE IT IS.

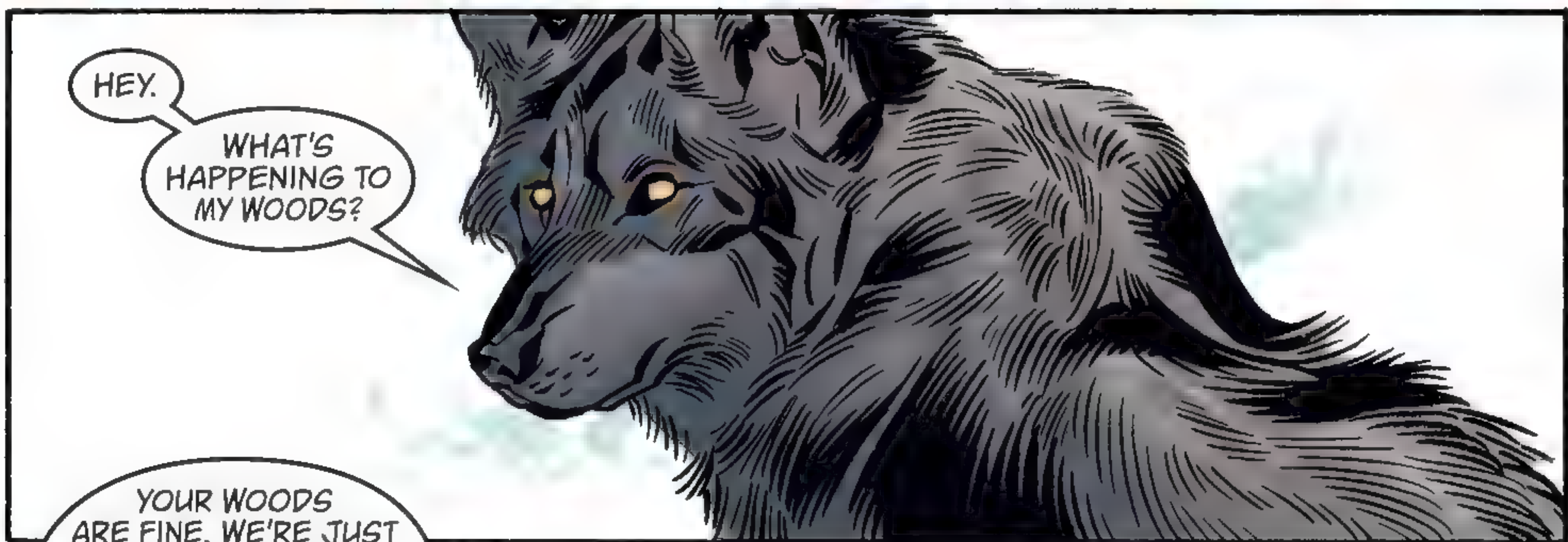
AFTER ALL THIS TIME, YOU STILL DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE, DO YOU?

THE SEVENTH SON OF THE NORTH WIND? THAT'S BIG.



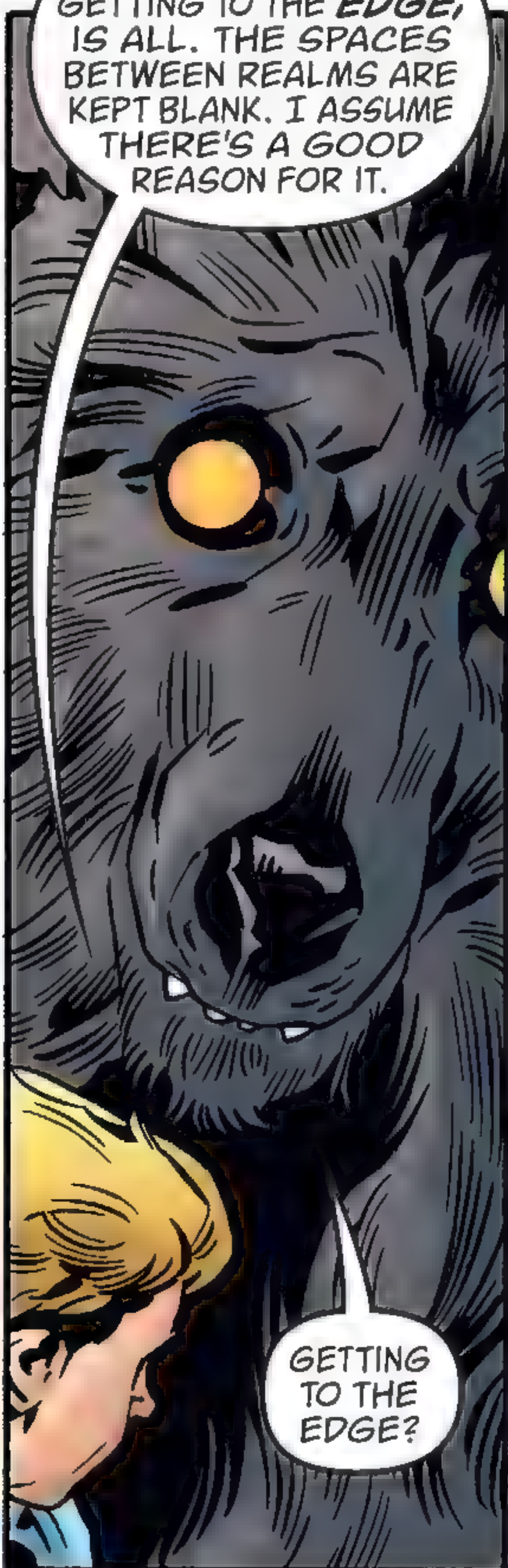
NOW FATHER OF THE *NEW* NORTH WIND? EVEN BIGGER.

DIFFERENT RULES APPLY TO THOSE WHO SHAKE THE WORLDS.



HEY.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TO MY WOODS?



YOUR WOODS ARE FINE. WE'RE JUST GETTING TO THE *EDGE*, IS ALL. THE SPACES BETWEEN REALMS ARE KEPT BLANK. I ASSUME THERE'S A GOOD REASON FOR IT.

GETTING TO THE *EDGE*?



BUT WE'VE BEEN SITTING STILL.

NOT ENTIRELY. I'VE BEEN MOVING US, SO I DON'T MISS MY *DEPARTURE* TIME.

SORRY, I SHOULD HAVE MENTIONED IT.



WE CAN WALK, IF THAT HELPS YOU PROCESS THE IMAGERY BETTER.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

TOWARDS THE EXIT. I DO HAVE TO LEAVE SOON.



YOU DON'T REALLY NEED ME TO EXPLAIN MORE. YOUR NEW LIFE IS PRETTY *BASIC*, ASSUMING YOU DECIDE TO KEEP IT.

BUT IF YOU CHOOSE TO RETURN, THEY'LL HAVE NEED OF YOU.



BAD TIMES COMING?

DO YOU *REALLY* HAVE TO ASK? BAD TIMES ARE ALWAYS COMING.

TRUTH IS, I THINK THAT'S THE MAIN *PURPOSE* OF THOSE WORLDS--OF THAT LIFE.



AND THE PURPOSE OF *THIS* ONE?

MAYBE IT'S TO DECIDE IF YOU'VE DONE *ENOUGH*, DONE YOUR BIT FOR THE OLD WORLD, AND CAN TAKE A WELL-DESERVED REST.



AND YOU DECIDED YOU WERE DONE? YOU HAD THE CHOICE TOO?

GOING BACK IS DIFFICULT. IT'LL BE THE HARDEST *THING* YOU'VE EVER DONE...

...PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY AND SPIRITUALLY. THE VAST SHITSTORM AWAITS.



SOMETHING ELSE TO CONSIDER--AND I DEBATED BRINGING THIS UP--I THINK, IN THE PAST LIFE, YOU WERE ALWAYS INTENDED TO BE ONE OF THE GREAT DESTROYERS.

ONE OF THE BAD THINGS THOSE WORLDS WERE DESIGNED TO OVER-COME.



BUT SOMETHING THREW A GIANT MONKEY WRENCH INTO THE WORKS AND EVERYTHING WENT OFF TRACK.

SNOW.

HMM?



SNOW WAS THE MONKEY WRENCH IN QUESTION. SHOULD BE HER MIDDLE NAME.

I HAD NO TROUBLE BEING A MONSTER. I LOVED IT, IN FACT, AND WOULD HAVE BEEN PERFECTLY CONTENT TO GROW EVER MORE MONSTROUS, DAY BY DAY.



THEN I RAN ACROSS SNOW, IN ONE OF THE EMPEROR'S SLAVE GANGS, AND I WAS OVERTHROWN.

JUST LIKE THAT?

INSTANTLY.



FROM THAT MOMENT ON, ANYTHING SHORT OF BEING WITH HER WOULD HAVE BEEN MISERY.

I HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO BECOME THE MAN SHE NEEDED.





ONE CAN PICK UP A LOT OF SCUTTLEBUTT DURING TRANSITION. BUT ONCE YOU MOVE INTO YOUR NEW LIFE, DOORS CLOSE.

I'M TOLD ONE OF THE PROPERTIES OF MY NEW ORDINARY LIFE IS I DON'T EVEN GET TO *HEAR* ABOUT THE EXCITING STUFF-- WHICH SUITS ME JUST FINE.



I THOUGHT YOU WERE AGAINST A LIFE WITHOUT PROBLEMS.

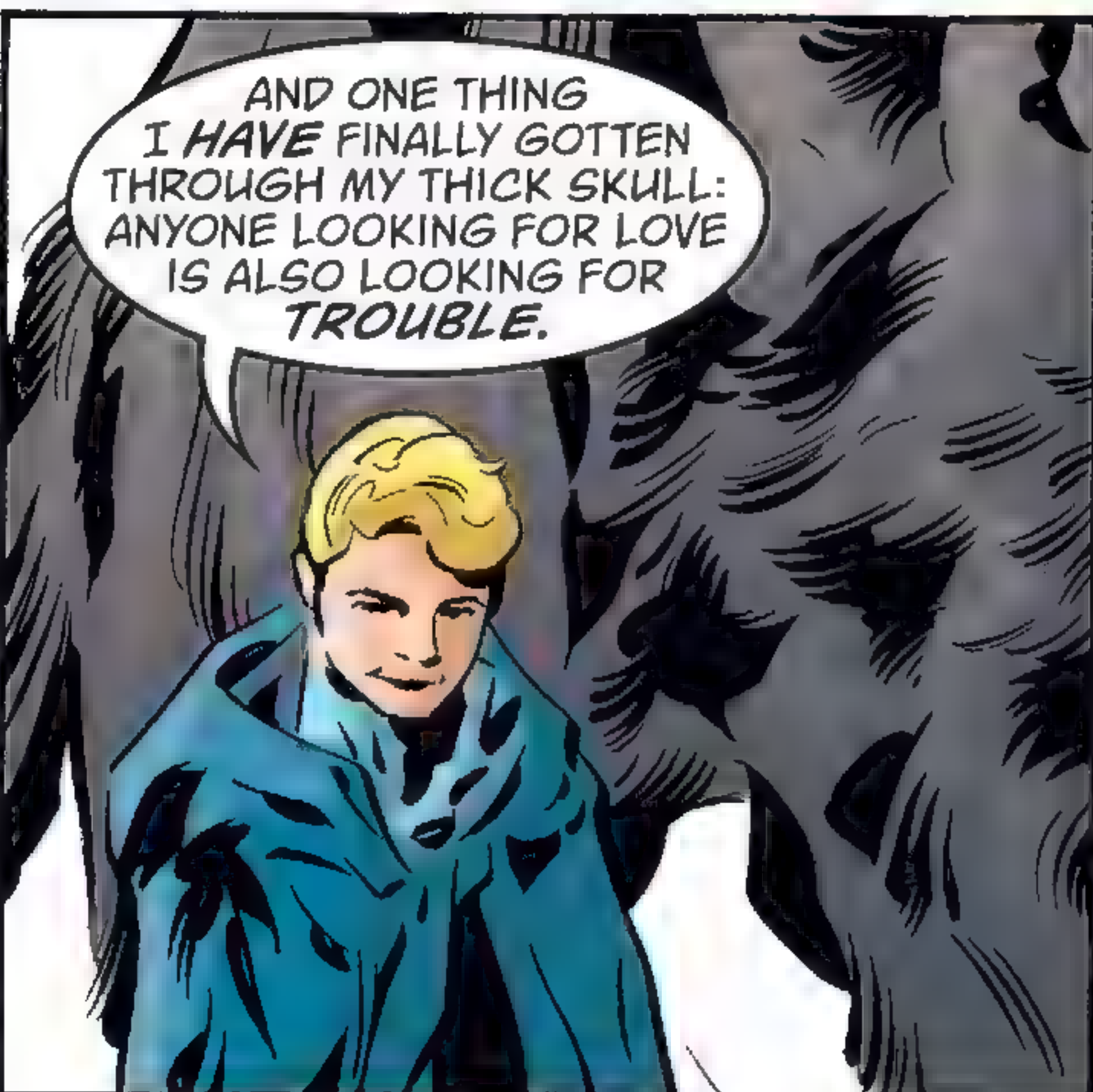
I AM. I SUSPECT THERE'LL BE PROBLEMS *APLENTY* WHERE I'M GOING.

HOPEFULLY NONE OF THE ADVENTUROUS KIND THOUGH.



FOR EXAMPLE, I *STILL* HAVEN'T ENTIRELY GIVEN UP ON TRUE LOVE.

NEVER WAS ABLE TO PIN IT DOWN, BACK THERE, BUT WHO KNOWS? A NEW WORLD OF OPPORTUNITIES WAITS.

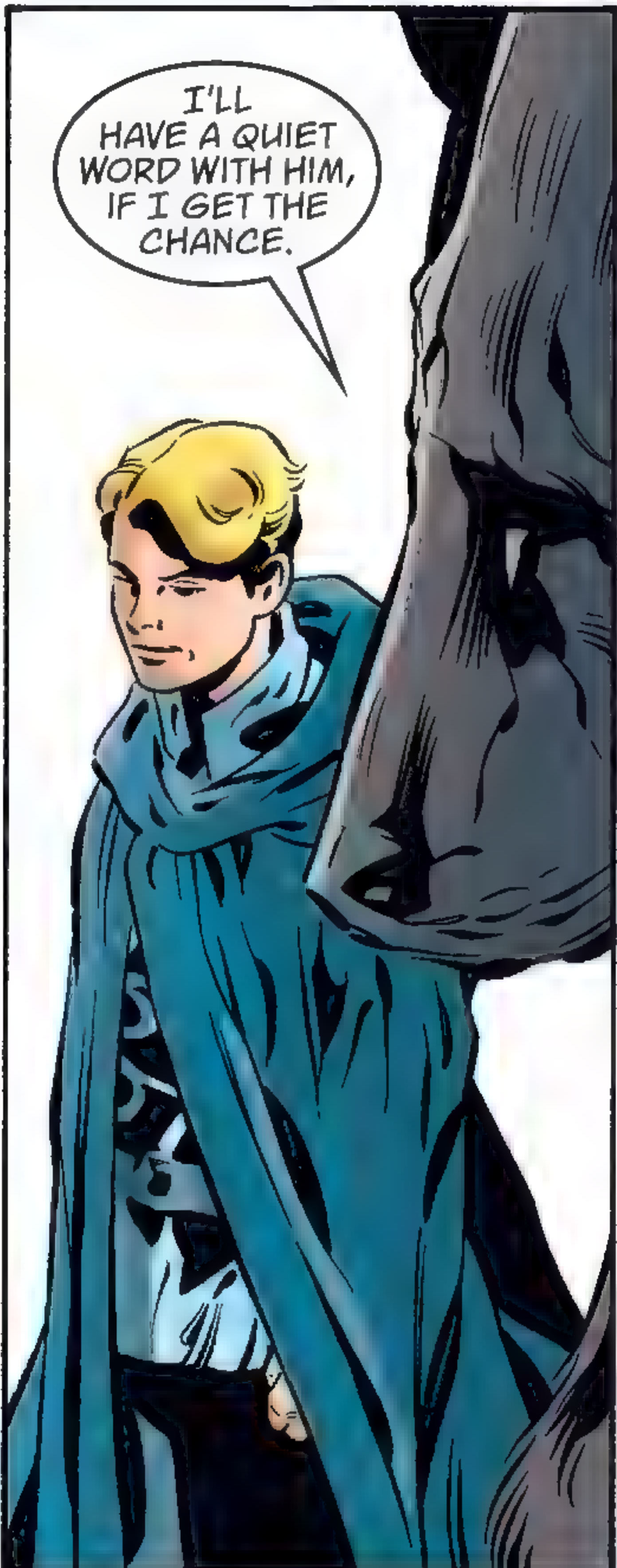
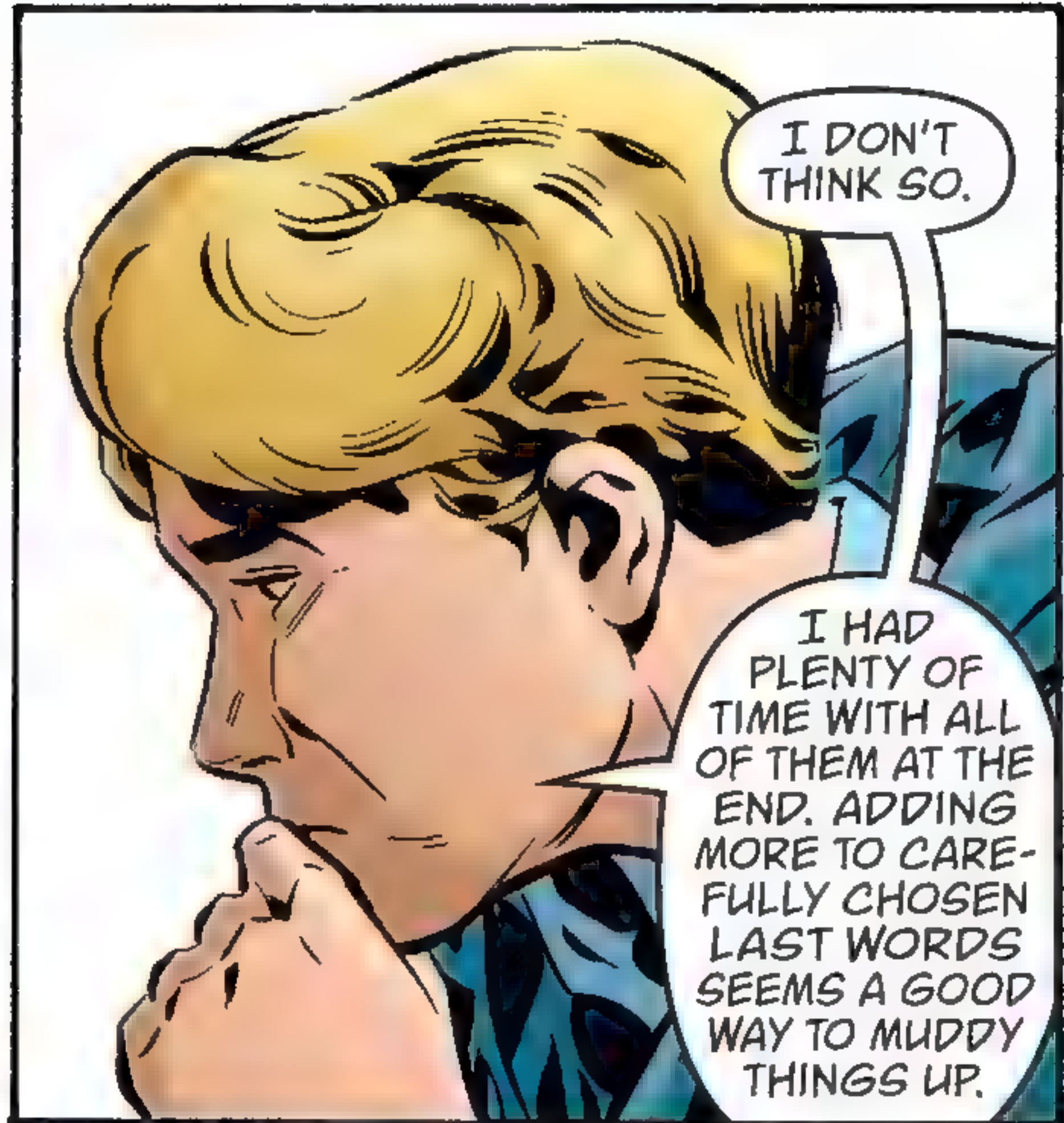


AND ONE THING I *HAVE* FINALLY GOTTEN THROUGH MY THICK SKULL: ANYONE LOOKING FOR LOVE IS ALSO LOOKING FOR *TROUBLE*.



YOU GOT *THAT* MUCH RIGHT.

NATURE OF THE BEAST.





RECENTLY I WENT FROM WORLD TO WORLD, LOOKING FOR MY SON AND DAUGHTER. HUNDREDS OF WORLDS, AND THERE WERE THOUSANDS MORE-- FILLED WITH LIFE.

AND NOW THERE ARE MORE HERE. ONE LIFE ENDS AND SIMPLY BEGINS AGAIN IN ANOTHER LOCATION?



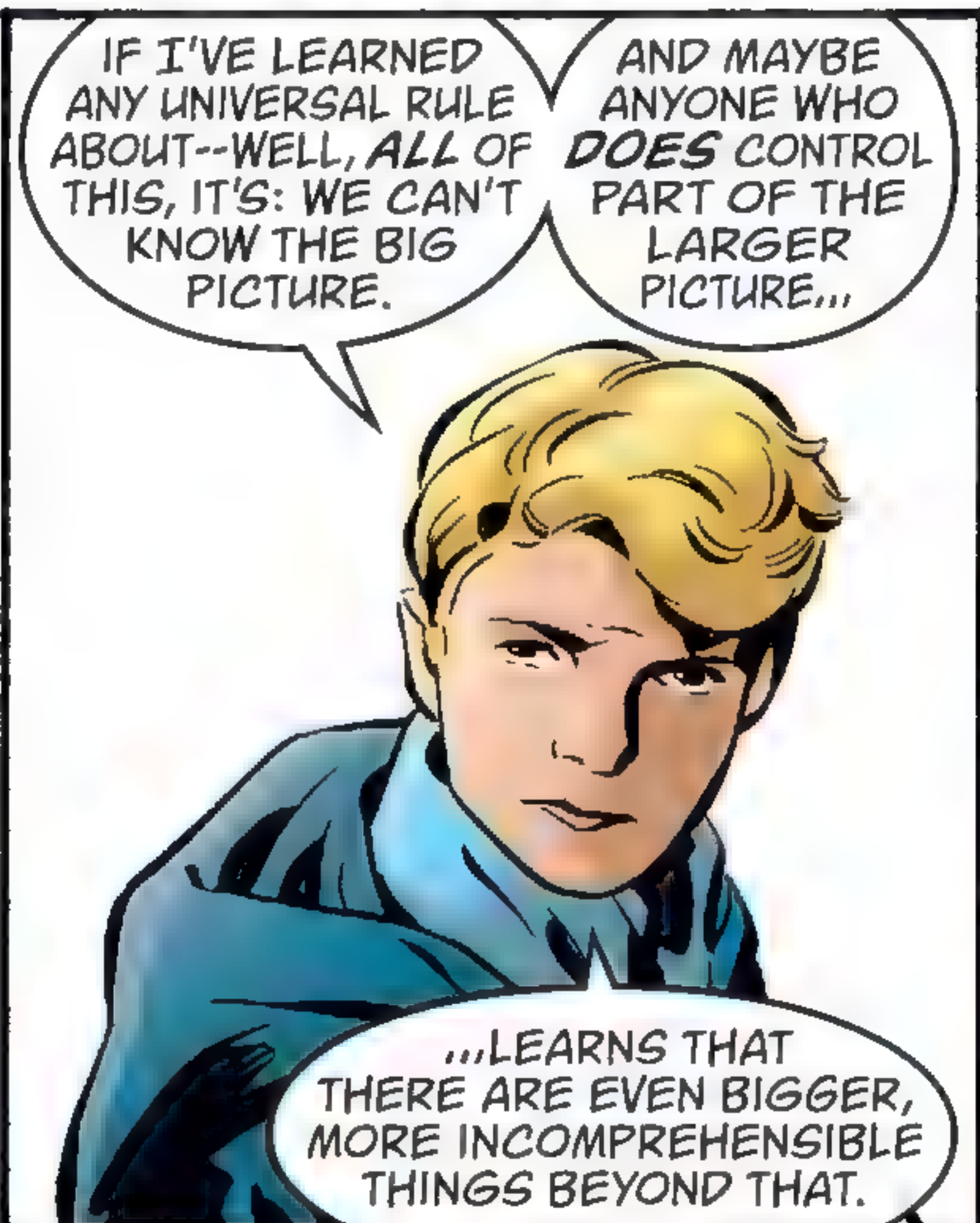
EVERYBODY GOES ON AND ON, WORLDS WITHOUT END?

WHAT'S IT ALL FOR, THEN? WHAT'S WORTH *FIGHTING* FOR, IF IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER? ALL OF IT JUST PICKS UP AND CARRIES ON AGAIN SOME-PLACE ELSE.



NOTHING'S EVER REALLY IN DANGER THEN, RIGHT? SO WHY BOTHER?

I DON'T KNOW.



IF I'VE LEARNED ANY UNIVERSAL RULE ABOUT--WELL, ALL OF THIS, IT'S: WE CAN'T KNOW THE BIG PICTURE.

AND MAYBE ANYONE WHO *DOES* CONTROL PART OF THE LARGER PICTURE...

...LEARNS THAT THERE ARE EVEN BIGGER, MORE INCOMPREHENSIBLE THINGS BEYOND THAT.



WHAT IF THAT'S A BLESSING? IT FREES US TO IGNORE THE HIGH AND MIGHTY CRAP AND CONCENTRATE ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO *US*.

YOU FIGHT FOR SNOW AND THE CUBS, AND BEYOND THAT, FOR THOSE WHO *MATTER* TO YOU. THAT'S THE SOLE RHYME AND REASON OF THE UNIVERSE.



TRIBALISM?
NO HIGHER
PURPOSE?

PERIOD?

WHY
NOT?



IF THERE IS A
GREATER INTENT, IT
ISN'T GOING TO BE
IMPOSED ON YOU--
ON US. YOU GET TO
DECIDE WHAT THAT
WILL BE, ALL BY
YOURSELF.

FREEDOM
SUCKS, HUH?

YEAH--
SOMETIMES.



HOLD ON.



THEY'RE CALLING
ME. GOTTA GO. HANG AROUND
HERE A BIT, BEFORE YOU HEAD
BACK TO THE WOODS.

YOU
HAVE ANOTHER
VISITOR. HE SHOULD
BE ALONG IN A
MOMENT.

HUH?

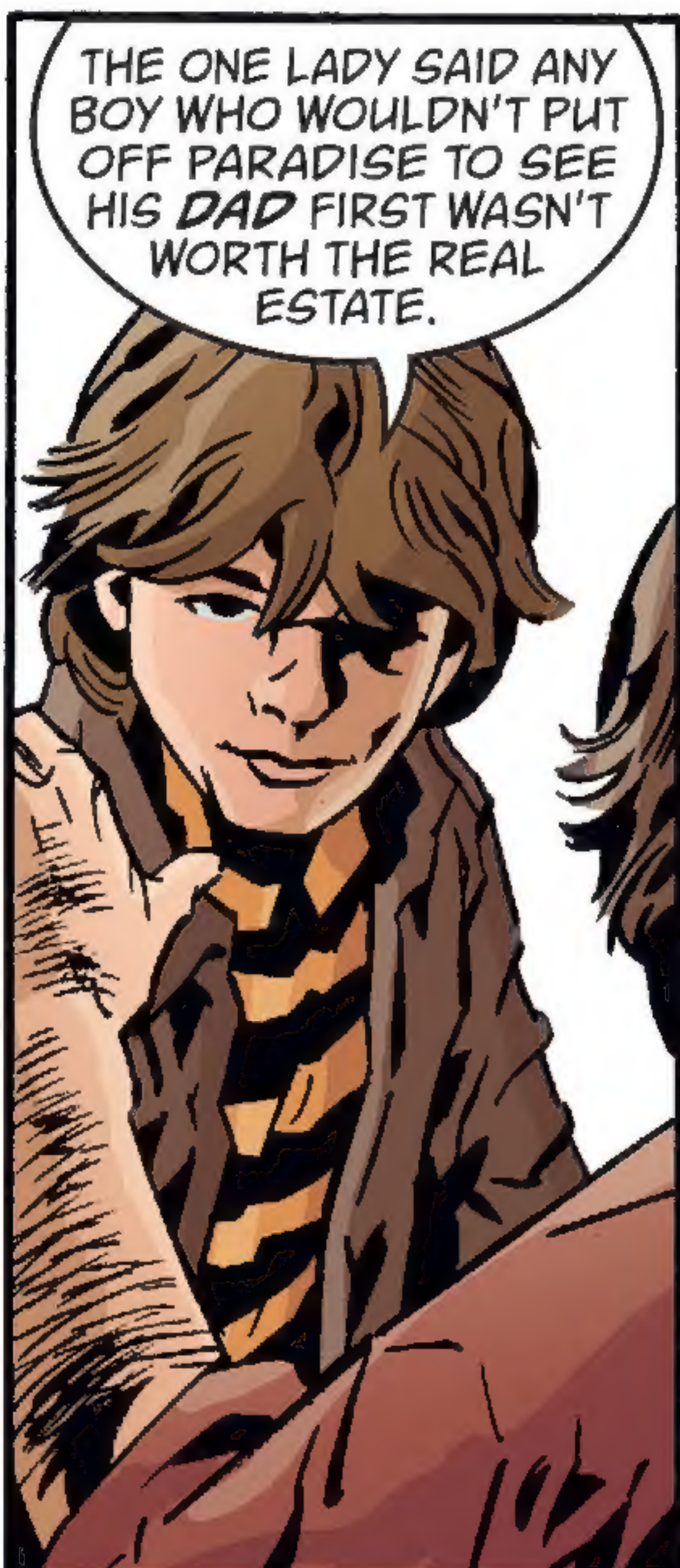


IF I
BURN UP ANY
MORE OF YOUR
TIME, HE WON'T
GET HIS **SHARE**.
AND BELIEVE ME,
YOU WANT HIM TO
HAVE AS MUCH
TIME WITH YOU
AS POSSI-
BLE.



BYE
NOW. TAKE
CARE.

GOODBYE,
BLUE.



I'M NOT SURE WHAT SHE MEANT, BUT WE CAN TALK FOR A WHILE, SO THAT'S GOOD, RIGHT?

THAT'S WONDERFUL, BUT... WHY ARE YOU HERE AT ALL? WHAT HAPPENED, SON?

I THOUGHT MAYBE YOU'D KNOW ALREADY. I CAN TELL YOU, BUT THEN YOU HAVE TO PROMISE TO TELL ME, HONESTY OF THE PACK, MAN TO MAN, WOLF TO WOLF.

DID I DO OKAY?

DID I DO THE RIGHT THING?





NATHAN